

Roman 15:22-33

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[0 : 00] I'm thankful to see so many visitors, and I know that some of you may be scratching your heads right now why I'm already up here to preach. We've only sung two songs. We do things a little differently here, and!

Not that we think that we're any more right than other people. We're just trying to find the best possible way we can magnify Christ in the way we do things and the flow of things. So, we move quickly into preaching and the proclamation of the Word, and we'll sing some more in response to the truth contained therein. We're still in Romans chapter 15. We've been working our way through. We've got three more weeks, I believe, Lord willing, following this Sunday to finish up the book of Romans, and I've got to tell you, honestly, I don't have a clue where we're going after that. So, be in prayer for me and the other leadership of the church, and we will know what will be best for the church as we begin to work through another book of the Bible together. But we have found ourselves in Romans chapter 15, and we're going to look today at verses 22 through 33. But before I read that to you, let me just remind you where he's been so far in this letter. And I keep saying this to you constantly, but context is so incredibly important as we study the Bible.

So many people want to hone in on a verse, which is good and valuable. We can wring so much truth out of a verse, a phrase, a word even, but we can't forget the context, where he's been, what he's been talking about, that's led us to this point.

Paul's letter to the Romans would have taken about an hour to read publicly, and that's how it would have been originally received. Written to the church, and somebody would have stood up and read it. We received a letter from the Apostle Paul.

I'm going to read it to you. And it in and of itself would have been a sermon in that way, and we've now broken it up over, oh gosh, I think almost two years. So I don't want you to forget where he's been, and this is an oversimplification, to be sure.

[1 : 58] But he's essentially said up to this point that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, forever. It's the simplicity of where we can say where he's been so far.

He has proposed to us that we're all sinners, Jew and Gentile alike. All of us have sinned. All of us are enemies of God. Left to our own devices, we have willfully rejected him.

We have placed ourselves on the throne, and we have worshipped ourselves. We have become humanistic in that way. And the only way to find redemption, the only way to be in a right standing with God, to live within his will, to have life now and forever, is through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. And we see that this is wholly a work of God. Left to our own devices, there is no way we would ever freely choose him. But God works a work in our hearts. He causes us to believe.

And because of that, we have surety. We can see beyond the troubles of this world to eternal glory. I'm in chapter 8 in my mind right now. We can know that nothing can separate us from the love of God because salvation is his work in our lives, in us and through us.

[3 : 18] And so Paul kind of finishes the formal treatise at the end of chapter 11 with the great exaltation to God, a praise of him. And then he moves in chapter 12 to work out some of the practical things.

Now, in light of these great truths, how then should we live? And he sums it up for us that we ought to then let love be genuine. Right? Abhorring what is evil, holding fast to what is good.

And he shows us how this works out in various contexts with various peoples. Even when it's difficult. Even when it means that we have to sacrifice of our own rights and privileges in the gospel. This is how we ought to live.

And he finishes then for us in chapter 15 verse 13 his doctrinal portion of the letter. And he turns then in verse 14 of chapter 15 to the epilogue.

He's starting to wind it back down for us. But there's still so much goodness to be wrung out of it. And we looked over two weeks from verse 15 through 21 we looked at Paul's satisfaction in the sovereign goodness of God to sanctify his people.

[4 : 24] Therefore, his boldness and his part in that ministry his humility in response to what God was doing in and through him. His activity the part that he played in bringing about the perfection of the church and then his ambition we saw his desire to be a pioneer to take the gospel to people who had never heard it.

And so today I want to show you pretty much the same things summed up in a bit of a different way. And these texts are challenging because there's not an explicit teaching in them.

Paul's intention here is not as he's writing this inspired is not to say and I want you to believe this thing let me pin it for you right now. But there are things that are implied things that we can pull out of it which can be difficult sometimes to prepare for and to study but also can be very rich as we look at the example laid for us as he continues to write this epilogue.

And so I want to look at three words and I just want to put these in your mind before we read the text together and pray. Those three words are providence planning and participation.

I came up with those on my own and I feel like I should get some kind of a merit badge of some sort for having. I don't usually have three points that all start with the same letter but I want you to engage your minds and plant these in there and remember providence planning and participation.

[5 : 51] And so let's read beginning in verse 22 through 33. This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you but now since I no longer have any room for work in these regions and since I have longed for many years to come to you I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

At present however I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem for they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them for the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you brothers by the Lord Jesus Christ by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Let's pray together. Father God I ask your blessing on this time as there may be some in this room that have never first believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ I pray that will cease to be the case this day that they will repent and believe that is the call confess with their mouths believe in their heart and they will be saved.

And for those of us who have believed in Christ I just pray that we'll continue to do the same repent turn from our sin get ourselves keep ourselves off the throne of our lives and turn to you ask you to reign and rule in our hearts again this morning.

[7 : 43] I pray Father as we talk about these practical ways that ministry has carried out in our life Christ will be magnified in it all that we might serve him in word and deed. And we pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. So the first word I mentioned to you was providence and before we dive into that I want to say to you there are some things I will not address in this text some things that are worth your study some things that maybe spill over into a sermon again for next week but I just want you to know that I recognize that I may be skipping over some parts of the text but I want you to notice firstly in this text providence.

In verse 32 there's a little phrase Paul says so that by God's will it was his earnest desire to go and visit the church that was in Rome.

He wanted to go there he wanted to be there but more than that subservient to that was his desire to serve God so that he would be taken there by God's will.

And in verse 22 he says this is the reason why I have often been hindered from coming to you this reason being Paul's God-given ambition to preach the gospel where Christ had not yet been named.

[8 : 59] So there again God's will was the reason that he had been hindered so far from fulfilling this desire from visiting the church that was in Rome. And we can say of Paul as we should be able to say of all of us that his life was characterized by a devotion to the will of God.

He took as his supreme example our Lord Jesus Christ. John 5 verse 30 Jesus says I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Let's look at another example from Paul's ministry. Turn with me to Acts chapter 16. We're going to begin reading in verse 6.

This is after Paul has taken on Timothy. Timothy joins Paul and Silas on their journey. They're traveling from Lystra. Verse 6 says And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

When they come up to Mysia they attempted to go into Bithynia but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia they went down to Troas and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying come over to Macedonia and help us.

[10 : 23] And when Paul had seen the vision immediately we sought to go into Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So notice here the providence of God working as Paul and his companions have a desire to go into these various regions they're prevented.

And we don't know how he says they're forbidden by the Holy Spirit in verse 6 and I'm losing my spot and in verse 7 but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So we don't really know how exactly that took place but God intervened. They intended to go someplace and yet the providence of God the controlling will of God in this world moved them prevented them to go there and took them instead someplace else to Macedonia a new place for the gospel to be advanced.

So God providentially rules the world. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3 says of Jesus Christ that he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

This is where we get this idea of providence that all things are held in sway by the power and word of God. That nothing happens apart from him.

[11 : 39] The universe finds this very tilt. The planets find their axis and their spin by the power of his word. This is a reality that's true in all of our lives.

There's a big picture there. The universe Jeremiah 10 23 says I know O Lord that the way of man is not in himself that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

We see here the spirit of God changing the scene making sure that they don't go one place and that they do go another and God providentially rules all things and he does it one of two ways.

He does it through acting supernaturally superseding the very laws of nature. We can see that to be the case in a number of Old Testament stories. Take for example the story of Jonah.

God caused a storm to arise and they threw Jonah overboard and he caused a big fish to swallow Jonah. And I would presume that normally you would die in the belly of a big fish.

[12 : 41] But Jonah was preserved for three days. He acted supernaturally. During the Exodus as he leads the Israelites out of Egypt they're led to a tight place where they can't go any further and there's a sea in front of them and there's an army bearing down behind them.

What does God do? He acts supernaturally. He parts the Red Sea and he leads them through the path he intended them to go. God acts providentially supernaturally. He also acts providentially by orchestrating everyday circumstances and I think this is the more common realization of this.

That things in our lives are working whether we recognize it or not. I warned you a couple of weeks ago to not define God by your experience.

Just because you experience something to be true doesn't necessarily make it true. Here the word of God speaks to us. God orchestrates our everyday circumstances.

I use meeting my lovely wife Sam as an example of that. I did not go searching the world for a five foot three cute brunette named Sam. That was not my aim in life.

[13 : 51] I didn't have a plotted course and I was searching and scouring for Sam. But God orchestrated the details. My sister and brother-in-law happened to begin attending the church that Sam was at.

Her father was the associate pastor there. They were asked to teach the Sunday school class for college and career for young people and Sam just happened to be in that class.

Jamie and Chris thought she would be very good for me and they providentially encouraged me to come to that class and spend time with them and meet Sam.

And I can look back on that and I can say without a doubt that God providentially brought us together as he does all things. By my experience I could say it was a coincidence.

I just happened to visit with them. They asked me to come. I visited and we bumped into each other and that was all good. And fine. I do not believe in luck or coincidence. But as a believer in Christ I do believe in providence.

[14:55] Now to just demystify the will of God for you a little bit. We hear a lot these days about the will of God and that's a great desire for all of us. We really want to know what is God's will for my life.

And what we fail to realize is that he has revealed in large part his will for your life. That in the scriptures we find the rule for godly living. And if we're not doing this first and foremost how can we ever expect to discover the hidden will?

Those little things. Where should I live? What job should I take? Who should I marry? We don't look at the revealed will of God. And remember context. Context. Where have we been?

Romans chapter 12 verse 1. Look there with me. Romans chapter 12 verse 1 and 2. Remember Paul just finished his doctrinal treatise. He says verse 1 I appeal to you therefore in light of all these truths, all these things we've said, therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, he sums it all up that way, right?

Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, forever, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Some translations render that, which is your reasonable worship, the obvious reasonable response to what God has now done your whole being to God.

[16:14] Verse 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Now most of us are fairly familiar with this, right? And certainly this has a broader meaning. If we're not being conformed to the world, being transformed by the renewal of our mind, if we're offering ourselves wholly to God, we'll be able to sort out those little details.

Who should I marry? Where should I live? Types of things. But most people sit around waiting for this grand revelation for that. You say, God, I'm transforming a mind. I'm offering myself as a sacrifice to you.

Why won't you speak to me and tell me exactly what it is you would have me do? But I think we missed the point. And what Paul's really doing is he's setting us up to hear everything else he's about to say. Right?

Do not be conformed. Be transformed. Let me show you what the transformed Christian life looks like. He's about to tell us all about that through chapter 15 verse 13. He goes to that.

[17:18] He talks about there being a genuine love for the saints, chapter 12 verse 10 through 13, for all people, chapter 12 verse 14 through 16, for your enemies, chapter 12 verse 17 through 21, and then on through 15, even when it's difficult or causes sacrifice on your part.

This is the good, acceptable will of God. We can all live every day confident that we're living in the will of God.

We do this. We wake up in the morning and we say to God, God, I'm unworthy of your salvation. Left to my own devices, I'm a wretched, wretched sinner, but because you have come and you have dwelt in me, you have changed my heart, I want to die to myself this day.

It is my reasonable service to offer myself as a sacrifice to you. Work in me, genuine love for people. Help me to know how it is I ought to respond appropriately to the gospel in this day, and then walk it out.

Get obedient to what God puts before you in that day. So God is providential in everything that's happening in our lives. As I said to you, we still play a part, we still have a means to his ends.

[18:37] How does that exactly work out? I don't know. But yet the scriptures speak. Second word, planning. So we see that God is providential at work, working out his perfect will in this world, and yet we see Paul here making plans, and we're to do the same.

Verse 24, he says, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. He had a plan to go to Spain, to take

the gospel there, go beyond the borders of Rome itself, go on to Spain, to the eastern part of the empire.

He had planned that they would help him along the way, and that he was going to stick around for a little while, enjoy their company. Verse 28, when therefore I've completed this, talking about bringing, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain, by way of you. Remember at the very beginning of the letter, Romans 1, verse 11-13, we see, for I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is what may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 17-18, he says, but since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us.

[20 : 20] You see that he made plans, he wanted to go places, right? He desired to do things, and for Paul, all these things were bound up in the overarching will of God for his life that he present the gospel to the Gentiles, right?

But yet, God, in his providence, shaped his plans. We can continue my analogy of Sam, right? Once I met Sam, I made plans to be around her.

I intentionally tried to be involved in things that she was being involved in. In fact, I actually took a job, moved in with my sister and brother-in-law for six months so that I could be close to where Sam lived, so that I could get to know her.

Our plans are important. They matter in these things. And as such, we should be making strategies to reach our classmates, our coworkers, our neighbors, etc.

We ought to be coming up with ways, intentional ways, to reach them with the gospel of Christ. If we are disciple-making disciples, that is the overarching definition of who we are, and it should be, it's the reasonable thing, in light of what Christ has done for us, then we should be planning how it is we should advance the gospel in the world.

[21 : 44] Keeping in mind, all along, God is providential. He's going to shape those plans. He's going to shake them up on you at times. And at times, he's going to carry them out exactly the way you plan for them to be.

Third word, participation. It's not just enough to plan it, we actually have to start doing it, right? You can't just make a plan, say, God's in control, God's providential.

There's an old little saying which has some bearing of truth, but is often taken too far for somebody to say, just let go and let God. There's some truth in that.

Yeah, sometimes we get too overbearing, we want to control everything, we want to do everything under our own might and power. And the point I think of that is to say, you really can't accomplish it all on your own, so let go of it, let God work in and through you to accomplish things, but it doesn't mean sit on your hands and just hope things work out.

Counsel people who have a desire, they want to be in the word of God more, they want to see a hunger in their life for that, say to them, you already have it, right? You have a desire to be in the word of God.

[22 : 52] Pray in the morning that God gives it to you once again, that he renews it in you afresh, and recognize that your very prayers are evidence of your desire to do so. So don't sit around after your prayer and hope that suddenly your hand is moved to pick up the Bible, and you open it up and you begin to read, just respond.

God, I pray that you would give me a desire for your word. I have a desire for your word. Open it up and in the process. Again, we are the means to God's end.

And I want to show you in this text three ways in which we participate. Now, recognize Paul here is talking about his particular mission, right?

The very thing that he was aiming to do. He was aiming to go from the eastern part of the Roman Empire, where he has said previously, he's accomplished the work that God had put before him. He had fully preached the gospel.

Now he's wanting to go to the western part of the empire, passing through Rome to Spain. We don't know for sure if he ever made it. I found some evidences last week I told you that it seemed like maybe he did, and then he went on from there to Britain.

[24 : 00] I, this week, found some evidences that he didn't. It would seem that the Christian faith didn't reach Spain until 200 years after Paul. So, I don't really know if he ever made it or not.

That's the point of what I'm saying to you. But, this is centering out. Something we ought to be doing, and this is how we should be doing it together.

So, we should be participating together in God's mission in the world and the particular ways he's given it to us. The first way is financial. Our participation should be financial.

In verse 24, he says that he hopes to be helped on my journey there by you. Which includes financial help. It actually goes a little bit beyond that, in fact.

The idea here of being helped is the idea of being escorted, being shown the way. Paul fully expected that when he got to Rome, that some of the believers from Rome would give him supply to travel to Spain, as well as take him there.

[24 : 59] Somebody who knew the road from Rome to Spain, wherever he was going in Spain, would actually take him along the way, would give of themselves to help him fulfill his task in the will of God.

We also see Paul delivering a financial gift to Jerusalem on behalf of the Gentiles in verses 25 to 27. We're not going to look at that much. But you see that there's this giving of oneself movement happening.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Another great example of this type of sacrificial giving to support the ministry of God.

2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 through 8. We want you to know brothers about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. And this not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

[26 : 15] This great outpouring of the generosity of the churches of Macedonia because they wanted to be involved in the work of God and relieving the suffering amongst the saints. So our participation needs to be financial.

There's lots of opportunities to do that where we live. This church needs that kind of participation. All of these people going all over the world.

I can't even begin to tell you all the places that people are headed out this summer. We have an immense number of people for as small as we are going all over the place and every single one of them need financial assistance.

God uses money to get things accomplished. Again, means to an end. We see the parable in Luke chapter 12. We studied this in our community group this past week, week before last.

The parable of the rich young fool. This parable of this man who profits well. He didn't do anything wrong to profit. The parable doesn't record it that way. He was profitable.

[27 : 18] And what he did with it is he built more barns and he said to his soul, soul, relax, eat, drink, be merry. He stored it up for himself. He spent it on himself. And God calls him a fool.

And then it's recorded, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. I think the real question is not how much would God have me give?

Lord, how much would you have me give to your purposes?! But how much of what you've granted me is for me, for my temporal blessing?

And how much of it is for the kingdom? How much of it ultimately and finally belongs to you? I think we ask that question wrongly so often. I really hope that of all of you in this room it won't be said of you fool.

You spent your money on yourself. What a stupid! stupid thing to do. Be rich towards God. Lay up treasure for yourself in heaven.

[28 : 24] So our participation is going to be financial. Our participation ought to be prayerful both in our lives and others. Verse 30 says strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf as a request of Paul that they strive together in prayers for his work the word that we get strive from here in the Greek means to fight or to struggle.

It's where we get the English word agonize from. We must fight to pray. The enemy does not want us to pray.

God as we've said before is providential. God is accomplishing what he will accomplish with or without us. But he is using us as the means to his end. He has included us in his purposes and a way he does that is he gives us prayer.

He uses the prayers of his people to accomplish his will. He moves us to pray that we might be involved. How can we possibly be involved in the global purposes of God here in Dahlonega, Georgia?

The simplest way? We can pray. We can pray That God will advance his kingdom across the world and we can rejoice as it's being done because he uses the prayer of his people.

[29 : 41] Our flesh works against us to this. Have you ever had those times where you set the time apart to pray and no matter what you're so distracted your mind goes a thousand different directions.

Like thoughts you're like why am I thinking about this? This makes no sense. Right? Seems like Colossians chapter 4 verse 12 records Epaphras who is one of you a servant of Christ Jesus greets you always struggling the same word always struggling on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18 and 19 We're instructed to pray at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end keep alert with all!

prayer is a work and it ought to be carried out. The Christian life really ultimately is fairly simple. It's not a complex thing for us to unravel. It's fairly simple but it is not easy. We must strain and strive and pray for the grace to pull these things off.

[31 : 01] As I said to you before work as if it all depended on you and praise God when it happens because it was his work in you to accomplish it. So what must we pray for? What are godly prayers?

What are prayers offered up within God's will? And we can look here at what Paul asked them to pray for him. Three things. And I think these are good general guide as we begin to think about our mission in the world.

How it is that we ought to be success and he asks for satisfaction.

Beginning in verse 31 he says that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea safety and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints success.

He was going to deliver the financial means that he wanted them to see it as acceptable so that God's will may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

[32 : 02] So he's asking them to pray for safety for success and for satisfaction. Those are God honoring prayers that as we travel as we go as we leave this place and go to our homes visit with our neighbors go to work tomorrow do all those things that we might have safety that we might have success in our ministry to others and that we'll be satisfied in whatever the outcome of these things are.

That's kind of a weird way of saying it but I wanted to keep the sound of those words the same so financial prayerful and communal verse 24 he says once I have enjoyed your company for a while speaking of when he's going to go on to Spain he wants to come and enjoy their company for a while in verse 32 he wants to be refreshed in their company remember again Romans chapter 1 verse 11 and 12 Paul longed to be with these Roman believers whose faith was being told of around the known world he had heard of the faith of the Roman believers and he longed to be with them that his faith would be encouraged that he might be built up to go on in this journey that was ahead of him in church that's what we're called to as well why do we do this like why do we get together on

Sunday morning is it just simply a command given to us we know we should Hebrews chapter 10 verse 24 let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some but encouraging!

ritual rite that you gain by coming together with the church on Sunday why do we meet together?

we meet together that we might be encouraged that we might be built up we might have the truth replanted in our hearts so that we'll get back out there and fight the good fight living the Christian life actually living the Christian life and I hate that we even have to put a qualifier on that but genuine faith carried out in the world is not going to be easy it's going to be a fight it's going to be a struggle it's a war out there this is base camp we all come back together we remind ourselves why we're fighting right this is a good war this is!

a war worth fighting right we have a great king he's going to accomplish it we need to get back out there and fight we let the word minister to us and heal our wounds from that week we were made for Christian community and I would say to you that Christian ministry doesn't happen apart from the context of the church that the things that you do are directly an extension of the body church those that you gather with on a weekly basis and so therefore we ought to meet together right in Hebrews chapter 10 we just read to you let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works as our flesh bears down on us as we have this battle within us between our spirit and between our flesh We need one another we need!

[35 : 30] to encourage one another and that's for all of us it includes me most certainly I need your encouragement and you guys have no idea how much you encourage me I know that most maybe none of you have walked up to me this week and said Nathan I just want to encourage you with told me something but I love to see the way you serve each other the way you!

each other to hear the stories of how you are sharing your faith on campus and at work that is such an encouragement to me it prods me on spurs me to continue to press on in the faith we need one another so our participation should be prayerful it should be financial and it should be communal and I absolutely love the way he ends this little part of his letter verse 33 says may the God of peace be with you all amen and his desire here is that that this little wish for them is that the God of peace will reign in their hearts that even though he's got these plans he's planning to come he wants these prayers for these various things that God is ultimately the God of peace and he doesn't mean here that God is a God that comes and brings peace peace